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Form 471 Best Practices

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Introduction

On-Tech is a technology consulting firm focused on managing the E-Rate process for schools and libraries. We provide a full range of E-Rate services for applicants, including: handling the entire application process; consulting on construction projects to ensure maximum E-Rate

funding; and reviewing proposals to ensure E-Rate compliance. In addition, On-Tech obtains E-Rate funding for school and library construction projects. On-Tech is not associated with any service provider.

Dan Riordan has been involved with the E-Rate since 1997, when he was trained by the New Jersey Department of Education to offer assistance to school districts in completing the application. Since then, he has worked on the E-Rate as a trainer, a district technology coordinator, and now a consultant.

General thoughts

What is this?

The Form 471 is the application for funding. In it, you will determine your discount level and list all the services for which you will be seeking E-Rate funding support. The form details the service providers you will use, and the amount of funding you will seek. In the Item 21 Attachments, a required part of the form, you will describe the services.

When to File

The deadline to file for 2013-2014 is midnight on March 14, 2013. That deadline also applies to Item 21 Attachments. **Note**: If you are planning to mail your certification (if you do not have a PIN to certify online) or Item 21 attachments, the deadline moves up from midnight to whenever the post office closes.

You must wait at least 28 days from the posting of your Form 470 before submitting a Form 471. You do not have to wait 28 to begin preparing the form, but you will not be allowed to complete Block 5 (where you list services) before 28 days have passed.

Note that the online application typically slows considerably in the last days before the deadline. So it would be wise to plan to file at least a week before March 14th.

Online or Paper?

Online. If you would be more comfortable filing on paper, find someone to help you file online. USAC once released the information that 80% of Forms 471 filed on paper are rejected because of applicant error.

Minimum Processing Standards

The online form does not catch all errors, but it does ensure your application meets the Minimum Processing Standards. Paper applications which do not meet those standards will be returned, and will not count as submitted until the corrected form is returned to USAC.

Where is the Form?

http://www.slforms.universalservice.org/Form471Expert/FY3_Criteria_471.aspx

Form 471 Interview

There is an application that walks you through the process of completing a Form 471 at
http://www.slforms.universalservice.org/Form471Interview/Welcome.aspx

However, it is probably simpler to copy last year's Form 470 and make adjustments as necessary.

Get Last Year's Form

Before you start completing the Form 471 for 2013-2014, get a copy of your form from last year. If you don't have a copy of last year's application, get one by:

1. If you don't know your Billed Entity Number, you'll need to find that first.
    a. Go to www.sl.universalservice.org/Utilities/BilledEntitySearch_Public.asp
    b. Type in your ZIP code
    c. Click the "Search" button
    d. Find your library's entity number in the list and copy it
2. Find your Form 471 number.
    a. Go to www.slforms.universalservice.org/Form471Expert/471StatusCheck.aspx
    b. Paste in the Billed Entity Number you copied in Step 1
    c. Set the Funding Year to FY 2012
    d. Click the "Search" button.
    e. On the following screen, click the "Continue" button
    f. Copy the six-digit number in the "Form 471 Application Number" column
3. Display the Form 471
    a. Go to www.slforms.universalservice.org/Form471Expert/DisplayExt471_StartSearch.aspx
    b. Paste in the Form 471 Application Number you copied in Step 2
    c. Leave the Security Code Number blank
    d. Click the "Display" button

You can navigate through the sections of the application using the blue buttons at the top of the page, but if you want to print out the application, click the "Display Entire Application" button at the bottom of the page.

Warning: One Form at a Time

You may be thinking: "I'll just leave last year's application in one window, and open a new tab in my browser for this year's application, and copy and paste between them." That can work, but be cautious, if you use navigation buttons in two different tabs, it will have quirky results. There are two workarounds:

1. Open the two applications in different browsers. For example, you could open last year's application in Internet Explorer, and open this year's application in Firefox.
2. Open last year's application, click "Display Entire Application," then begin next year's application. That way, you'll be able to see all of last year's application without using any navigation buttons.

Item by Item

Applicant Search

When you go to the page above, the first screen is a search for the applicant. If you know your entity number, type that in and click the "Begin 471 Process" button. And you should know your billed entity number, because you're looking at last year's application.

If you don't know your entity number, you can just type in your ZIP Code, click "Begin 471 Process" and pick your billed entity from the list.

The "applicant" is the organization which will write checks to the service provider. If your library has its own budget and its own purchase orders, the library is the applicant. If the municipality pays the telecommunications providers, then the municipality is the applicant. If you are in a situation where some services are purchased from the library, but other services are provided by the municipality, you will need two Forms 471.

Be careful to pick your billed entity, not your location. For most libraries, the Billed Entity Number is also used as an Entity Number for the main location, but if there is a difference, be sure to pick the billed entity. In general the Billed Entity Number for Colorado libraries will be a six-digit number starting with 142.

Once you have highlighted the radio button next to your entity, click the "Accept" button.

Block 1:

Form Identifier

Put whatever you like in this box. The identifier is pretty useless, but put in something that will help you identify which year the form is for, and if you are doing more than one application in a year, which application.

Item 1:

This information will be filled in automatically.

Item 2:

Pick the funding year from the drop-down. Only one year is available, but you need to choose it.

Item 3:

This information will be filled in automatically.

Item 4:

This information will be filled in automatically.

Item 5a:

If your library is listed as the applicant in Item 1, check "Library." If your municipality is listed in Item 1, then check "Consortium."

Item 5b:

Check "Public."

Item 6a-e:

Some considerations when choosing the contact person:

1. This person **cannot** be associated with any service provider
2. This person will get all the questions during application processing. This person should be the most knowledgeable about the application. Also, this should be someone who will be available to answer questions quickly.
3. The information provided is not public. This contact info is only available to people who have the Security Code for your application.

Item 6g:

Put On-Tech Consulting in here. Even if you manage to complete the form without our help, better safe than sorry. Since "consultant" is not well defined, even this Webinar is potentially makes us a consultant.

Form 471 Number:

After you complete Block 1 and click the "Block 2 & 3" button, you will see a screen that shows your Form 471 number and Security Code. Print this page. Twice. Save the Security Code in multiple places. You will need that Security Code later.

Block 2 & 3:

Item 7:

Fill in only the "Libraries" column. Note that the information in this section is important to justify the program, but the numbers do not affect your application, so you can estimate if you need to, and don't spend too much time worrying about this data. You have to enter something in every box in the "Libraries" column, so be sure to enter zeros as needed.

Block 4:

Adding Entities

You will need to add one entity for each location covered by this application. For single-building libraries, the Billed Entity Number (BEN) from Block 1 will generally be the Entity Number that should be entered here.

Once you have put the information in for the first entity, either click "Add Entity" (if you have more than one library location) or "Block 5" if all your entities are listed.

Enrollment and NSLP numbers

You will need to provide enrollment and NSLP numbers for all the school districts that fall within your service area. You can find that information at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/PDF/2011PM/PK-12FreeandReducedLunchEligibiltybyCountyandDistrict.pdf

Block 5:

For Block 5, you will need to create a separate entry for every service provider, and if you receive both telecommunications and Internet access from the same provider, you should create two entries for that service provider.

Pick the category of service and enter the SPIN number for your first entry, then click the "Search" button. Click "Accept" at the next screen, and you will see a full Block 5 entry.

Item 10:

Leave this blank. You would only enter information here is you had a 2012-2013 funding request for Internal Connections (equipment) that had not yet been approved.

Item 11:

This is automatically filled in.

Item 12:

Enter the Form 470 number. After you have entered the number, press the Tab key and a window will pop up showing info about the 470 you selected. Make sure it's the right 470. If it has not been at least 28 days since the 470 was posted, you will not be able to proceed.

Item 13 & 14:

This is automatically filled in.

Item 15a:

Check this box if you do not have a contract for the services sought.

Items 15b:

If you have a contract number, enter it here. If you checked the box in 15a, you must enter "T" (tariff) or "MTM" (month-to-month). If you aren't sure if a tariff exists, put in MTM. If you have a contract, but it does not have a number (like most contracts), just put in "N/A"

Item 15c:

Check this box if you are purchasing off a Colorado state contract.

Item 15d:

Check this box if this service is to be delivered under a multi-year contract which was on last year's application.

Item 16a:

If you have an account number, type it here. If you don't have an account number, type "N/A."

Item 16b:

Check this box if you have multiple account numbers for this service. If you check this box, you will have to provide those account numbers in your Item 21 Attachment.

Item 17:

This is automatically filled in.

Item 18:

Put in the date on which you selected your vendor. This date **must** be:

1. After the date in Item 17
2. Before the date you submit this 471.

Item 19:

The date the service will start. For almost all services, this should be 07/01/2013. Unless you have a compelling reason to pick a different date, put in July 1st.

Item 20a:

If you checked the box in Item 15a, put in the last date you will receive service. For almost all services, this should be 06/30/2014.

Item 20b:

If you did not check the box in Item 15a, put in the last date that the contract expires. For almost all services, this date should not be earlier than 06/30/2014. If you have a contract that will expire before June 30, 2014, you should get it extended before filing the 471.

Item 21:

Put in any identifier you want. This identifier is completely useless, so put in anything you want. Note that the form tells a lie here: it says, "You MUST forward a description of this service on paper." You can submit the Item 21 Attachment on paper, but submitting online is a much better idea.

Item 22:

If you have only one entity, you will select that entity in Item 22a. If the service in this entry will be used by all the entities in Block 4, you will select the worksheet in Item 22b.

Item 23:

Enter the amounts you will be paying for this service. You should be prepared to back up the amounts you put here during application review.

Item 23 Tip:

Leave Items 23b and 23g blank. If you put anything in either box, you will face extra scrutiny during application processing. If you have ineligible costs, subtract them from the monthly and/or annual amounts before entering them in Items 23a and 23f. So, for instance, if your monthly phone bill is $100, and $5 of that is for an extra directory listing (which is not eligible), put $95 in Item 23a.

Item 24:

Check the box.

Item 24b:

Check the box.

Item 25:

Check the box.

Item 25a:

This is automatically filled in

Item 25b:

This is automatically filled in

Item 25c:

This is automatically filled in

Item 25d:

This amount reflects the cost of support necessary to operate your voice and data infrastructure. So it would include tech support, the cost of end-user equipment (phones and computers), cost of electricity, etc. Estimate. As long as you don't enter zero, this box will not affect your application.

Item 25e:

This is automatically filled in

Item 25f:

DO NOT CHECK THIS BOX. Do not. Ever. If in fact you have received funds as described, return those funds immediately.

Item 26:

Unless you are requesting Priority Two services (Internal Connections or Basic Maintenance), check the second box

Items 27-37:

Check the boxes.

Items 40 -42:

Who should certify?

The form should be certified by the person who will eventually sign the purchase order and the checks. Note that the information in Item 27 is **not** published on the Web, so feel free to use real email addresses.

Paper or online certification?

You should have a PIN, since you certified the Form 470. If you do, certify online.

If you don't have a PIN, click on paper certification button, print the pages, sign and date them, and mail them in. Send the certification by certified mail (or through another service that provides proof of when it was sent). If you waited until the last minute, know when your post office closes.

Whose PIN is it?

The PIN you receive is like your signature, you cannot share it with anyone else, or let someone else borrow it. It is also unique to the current BEN. So if you move to a new library, you will need a new PIN.

Item 21 Attachments

The hidden part of the Form 471 is in some ways the heart of the form. In Item 21 above, you were instructed to send a description of the services offered. Those descriptions are called "Item 21 Attachments."

Again, my advice is to file online.

1. Go to http://slforms.universalservice.org/Item21app/frmBenAppNumRequest.aspx
2. Type in the information that you printed out back when you first completed the information in Block 1. Remember, I told you to print it twice.Click Continue
3. You will see a list of your FRNs (funding reqests, the items you entered in Block 5). For each entry, click on the link to complete the attachment.

Tips for Item 21 Attachments:

1. Less is more. Do not give out extra information here. Supply a narrative, the information required in the second screen, and generally nothing else. Excess information will prolong application review.
2. For Internet access, be sure to include the number of connections and the bandwidth of each connection

After you File

Look for the RAL

In a few weeks, you will receive a Receipt Acknowledgment Letter. Pay attention to this letter. It is a second chance to correct mistakes you may have made. Check the information in the letter.

Be Prepared for PIA

Most applications will generate at least one question from PIA (Program Integrity Assurance, not Pain In the…). Answer any questions they ask quickly. Do not provide any information they didn't ask for.

More Resources

On-Tech

www.on-tech.com/erate

This handout and other E-Rate information and links are available at our Web site.

blog.on-tech.com

For a more informal discussion of the E-Rate, visit our blog. You can search for a topic of interest to you and get an insider's view.

If you have specific questions, contact us.
    Email: info@on-tech.com
    Phone: 732-530-5435

Schools & Libraries Division (SLD)

www.usac.org/sl

This Web site is a wealth of information, and the information is official. Start by pointing at the light blue "Schools and Library Applicants" button, and selecting the relevant step.

File online at: http://www.sl.universalservice.org/menu.asp

Download paper forms at: http://www.universalservice.org/sl/tools/required-forms.aspx